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SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA RELATIONS: ABKHAZIA

Classified By: CDA Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) Summary. Both the MFA and the Georgian Embassy rejected as "nonsense" Kommersant Daily's June 27 report that Georgia had proposed dividing Abkhazia into two separate zones, one controlled by Russia and the other by Georgia. The MFA termed Georgian DFM Vashadze's June 23 visit to Moscow a failure, as it did not yield a concrete agenda for the planned summit at the end of the summer, but acknowledged that Vashadze had brought some proposals. The proposals included creating free economic zones in the Gali and Ochamchire districts, withdrawing peacekeeping forces, and creating a joint Georgian-Abkhaz administration and police presence in the two districts. They also provided for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Abkhaz leader Bagapsh rejected the proposals during his June 25-26 meetings with Medvedev and DFM Karasin in Moscow. Bagapsh instead confirmed the crucial role of Russian peacekeepers in providing security in the conflict zone and urged the Georgians to abide by the 1994 Moscow Agreement and relevant UNSC resolutions. In a June 27 statement, the MFA expressed disappointment that the details of the June 30 Friends' meeting had been known to the GOG, which intentionally leaked the information to the press to pressure Russia. End summary.

Ignore Kommersant

12. (C) FM Lavrov rejected what the Kommersant Daily reported on June 27 as a new Georgian proposal -- to divide Abkhazia into two spheres of influence -- as a plan that had "absolutely no relation to reality." On June 23, MFA CIS Fourth Department Conflicts Division Chief Aleksey Dvinyanin termed Georgian DFM Vashadze's June 23 visit, a "failure," and the Kommersant article on the new plan for Abkhazia, "nonsense." Per Dvinyanin, it was telling that all involved parties, who rarely agreed on any issue regarding the conflict, unanimously rejected the report on the "new Georgian proposal" to divide Abkhazia into spheres of influence between Georgia and Russia while keeping Georgian territorial integrity intact. Dvinyanin dismissed the article as disinformation.

Vashadze Failed

13. (C) Dvinyanin and MFA CIS Fourth Deputy Director Semyon Grigoriyev affirmed that Vashadze, who came to Moscow to prepare for the Medvedev-Saakashvili summit (suggested by Medvedev during the two presidents' first meeting during the St. Petersburg Economic Forum), brought a non-paper on Georgia's proposal for a peace settlement. Among the ideas in the non-paper were the creation of free economic zones in Gali and Ochamchire districts, withdrawal of peacekeeping forces, and the creation of a joint Georgian-Abkhaz administrative and police presence in the two districts, as well as the return of refugees and IDPs. Although certain points were acceptable, Dvinyanin argued, the paper as a

whole could not be the basis for the planned summit. The GOR could agree to the easing of economic restrictions, establishment of maritime communication and Georgia's participation in the preparations for the Sochi Olympics, but rejected the cancellation of the April 16 presidential instructions to establish closer ties with Abkhazia and the immediate withdrawal of the railroad battalion. He said that the Georgians should not waste the opportunity opened up by the good beginning between the two presidents and should prepare a serious agenda for the summit. (Note: Ekho Moskv'y's Aleksey Venediktov told us June 30 that Medvedev and Saakashvili had hit it off during their maiden meeting. In Venediktov's version, subsequent problems, such as Russia border troops, and the weekend explosions in Gagra and Sukhumi were caused by those who wished to sabotage that rapprochement.) Medvedev and Saakashvili will meet once more on July 6 at Nazarbayev's birthday celebration in Astana before the late summer summit in Sochi.

Bagapsh in Moscow

14. (C) Grigoriyev, who attended the June 25 Karasin-Bagapsh meeting, told us June 30 that DFM Karasin had informed Bagapsh and "Foreign Minister" Shamba about the general ideas in the Georgian non-paper. Bagapsh had been largely negative, saying that Abkhazia was not yet ready for "such serious proposals." Shamba, who had just returned from Stockholm where he met with Alasania, had also expressed disappointment at what he perceived to be Alasania's tougher position.

15. (C) Grigoriyev cautioned against reading too much into Bagapsh's visit to Moscow, noting that Bagapsh visited the Russian capital frequently. The only unexpected element (for the MFA, too) had been Bagapsh's meeting with Medvedev. Grigoriyev characterized the meeting as a 10 - 15 minute courtesy call, intended to establish a personal link between the two. A short statement issued after the meeting said that Medvedev and Bagapsh stressed that any progress in resolving the conflict could only be achieved by the implementation of all earlier agreements, including the 1994 Moscow Agreement and all relevant UNSC resolutions, while Bagapsh noted the crucial role of Russian peacekeepers in providing security in the conflict zone. Grigoriyev repeated the "well-known" GOR position: the signing of a non-use of force agreement and "normalization" of the situation in the Kodori Gorge. In response to a query about press reports that Bagapsh had asked for Russian assistance in tightening security of the sea border, Grigoriyev said Bagapsh had not made an official request, but had speculated about such assistance within the framework of the 1994 Moscow Agreement.

Friends More Friendly with Georgia

16. (C) In a June 27 statement, the MFA expressed surprise and disappointment at reports that the GOG had accepted the new peace plan proposed by the Friends and that it remained only to convince Russia to join the rest in accepting it. Understanding that the details were to be worked out during the June 30 meeting in Berlin, the GOR felt "left out" and thought that the "leak" was designed to exert pressure on Russia. Still, Grigoriyev said, Russia was generally positive about the German proposal and agreed that a three-step process was a good idea. He noted, however, that some of the suggestions were "too far from reality," and cited the plan for full return of IDPs as an example.

Georgian Embassy View

17. (C) Georgian Ambassador Kitsmarishvili also rejected the Kommersant article, saying that no such proposal was presented by Vashadze, as reported in the article. Georgian officials said in chorus that the exchange -- Abkhazia for NATO -- was out of the question. The main theme of the non-paper presented to the GOR by Vashadze was first to solve

urgent political issues such as IDP return, which was the precondition for subsequent economic cooperation, and to install measures to increase economic ties such as the creation of free economic zones in the Gali and Ochamchire regions. The Georgian officials informed us that DFM Karasin planned to visit Tbilisi soon for further preparations for the summit. Georgian DCM Shugarov thought it was important that the negotiation process was in place, even if each meeting produced little result. He felt that the international community, including the EU, the Friends and Russia, had begun to study Georgia's proposals more seriously.

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